

ARTICLE APPEARED
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1 June 1987**Nation****New Look at an Old Failure***An ex-CIA historian fights to air his version of the Bay of Pigs*

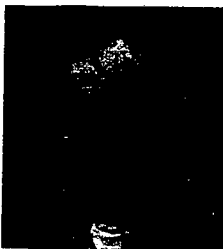
As the nation picks through the wreckage of the Iran-*contra* affair for lessons, a dispute is brewing within the intelligence community that could throw new light on the granddaddy of all covert-action fiascos: the Bay of Pigs.

AThe CIA's former chief historian, Jack Pfeiffer, is suing to force the release of his detailed and still classified studies on the invasion, which challenge the conventional historical wisdom about why it failed.

Previous historians have tended to place most of the blame on the CIA's deputy director for planning, Richard Bissell. His penchant for secrecy, they say, led him to keep the agency's intelligence division and other military analysts pretty much in the dark, thus resulting in a poor assessment of the risks involved. Indeed, a still secret case study prepared for the Tower commission, one of a series that sought to compare previous covert activities with the Iran-*contra* affair, also attributes the Bay of Pigs failure to excessive secrecy of CIA planners and lack of adequate review by intelligence experts.

AIn fact, Pfeiffer argues, a series of meetings and memos shows that senior officials of the CIA's intelligence division and Pentagon planners were briefed at all stages of the discussion. According to Pfeiffer, the conventional view casting Bissell as the villain of the tale is reflected in a damning report by the CIA's inspector general at the time, Lyman Kirkpatrick. Although Kirkpatrick, 70, who resigned from the CIA in 1965, ordered the destruction of all the records on which his report was based, Pfeiffer managed to uncover the material. He says it led him to conclude that Kirkpatrick had deliberately skewed the report to discredit Bissell, who was his rival for the position of CIA director.

Kirkpatrick defends his original assessment. "Bissell was running it [with a group] that was cut off from everyone who



Historian Pfeiffer

should have assessed the plan." Denying that his conclusions were based on personal rivalry, Kirkpatrick argues. "Bissell and I were friends." Bissell, 77, who was eased out of the agency in 1962 and until now has never publicly defended his role, comments dryly. "That's not the case."

In his view, and that of Historian Pfeiffer, the reason that the Bay of Pigs failed was not because the machinery of Government was short-circuited. Rather, it was a case in which the entire system worked the way it was supposed to—and produced a fiasco.

The newly elected President, John Kennedy, was adamant about not involving American forces. Indeed, he insisted on hiding any evidence of American support for the exile army. For that reason the White House decided to cancel crucial air strikes and change the site of the landing from the town of Trinidad, at the foot of the central mountains, to the quieter venue of the Bay of Pigs. It was these decisions, Pfeiffer argues, rather than a faulty process of consultations, that doomed the operation from the start.

The Navy was ready in case Kennedy decided to lift his ban on direct U.S. involvement. Bissell revealed in his interview with TIME. As the Cuban exiles went ashore that moonless night in April 1961, a force of about 1,500 Marines waited on a ship near the coast. Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations at the time, confirms this previously unreported deployment. The Marines were "available," says Burke, now 85. "These things are just a general military precaution."

After 25 years, Pfeiffer thinks it is time for his own studies of the fiasco to be made public. "Kirkpatrick's order to destroy the documents was outrageous," he commented last week. "What's to say the CIA's records on the Iran-*contra* matter won't disappear the same way?"

By Jay Peterzell/Washington